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ABSTRACT

In order to compose a picture of the typical master's level graduate of special education programs at Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge), a follow-up study involving 52 recent graduates was conducted. Each graduate was mailed a questionnaire designed to gather data in five areas: personal information, employment status, financial information, professional and educational information, and student evaluation of the curriculum. Conclusions from survey results included the following: 79 percent of special education graduates were working full time in programs for exceptional children; graduates were working with a variety of children in numerous types of settings; graduates were generally active in professional organizations that serve exceptional children; graduates reported that preservice training contributed positively to job competency; and recommendations for program changes were made such as adding coursework in such areas as remedial reading and counseling. (SB)

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A FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF GRADUATES OF MASTER'S LEVEL SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS AT LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY, BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

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A FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF GRADUATES OF MASTER'S LEVEL SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS AT LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

Training special educators is one of the chief responsibilities of Special Education Services at the Baton Rouge Campus of Louisiana State University. The program of teacher preparation began in 1965, but since September of 1970 it has shown remarkable growth. Master's degrees are available at present in five areas of specialization: mental retardation, emotional disturbance, learning disabilities, hearing impairment and administration. The curricula consist of a sequential core of basic and specialized coursework that terminate with a full-time practicum experience. The faculty has attempted to provide a maximum amount of contact with exceptional children and with programs and facilities designed to serve their needs. In addition, the experiential aspects of the training are integrated with coursework through seminar and discussion activities.

Since September, 1970, eighty-two master's degrees in special education have been awarded. Early in the fall term, 1974, a list of graduates was compiled, and each graduate was sent a questionnaire designed to gather follow-up information. The follow-up related to four areas: (1) Personal Information, (2) Employment Status, (3) Financial Information and (4) Professional and Educational Information. A fifth section of the questionnaire provided an opportunity for student evaluation of various aspects of the curricula. The following is a report of the results of the survey.

Eighty-two questionnaires were mailed to the last address of record for the graduates. Fifty-two usable returns were received. Two en-

velopes were returned as undeliverable by the post office. The fifty-two responses represent a return rate of 63.4 percent.

The replies provided the basis for the following composite description of the typical graduate. She is married, white, female, and under 30 years of age. She is employed as a public school teacher of exceptional children within the state of Louisiana in a metropolitan area of more than 50,000 people. She has held her position between one and four years although she is likely to have from four to ten years of total teaching experience. More than likely, she teaches a class of mentally retarded children at the intermediate level with a range from nine to fourteen years of age. She is certified to teach in the area in which employed and most probably is certified to teach in some other area of special education as well. Her total annual family income is $20,000 or more, and she earns between $7,000 and $10,000 annually in her special education job. It is highly likely that she was a full-time student while she was working for the master's degree and that she received financial help in the form of U.S. Office of Education fellowship funds. In addition, she probably did one of the following things to finance her education: (1) depended on her spouse's earnings, (2) worked full-time, or (3) worked part-time. It is highly unlikely that she is presently enrolled in any course or that she has completed any higher degree or certificate. However, she is very likely to be interested in pursuing a doctorate at some time in the future. She is also active professionally in that she holds membership in some professional organization (most probably the Council for Exceptional Children) and has attended at least three meetings within the past twelve months on non-school time.

While the above description applies to the typical graduate, the survey resulted in some highly interesting information about the non-typical graduate. In addition, it provided a great deal of data about the graduates as a group, data that will be useful in departmental self-evaluation and future planning. A digest of the data entitled Personal Information and some comments follow.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Only seven (15%) of the fifty-two respondents were male, and only three (5.7%) were blacks. There were no black male graduates. The majority of the group was young. Thirty-three (63%) were under thirty; nineteen (36.5%) were over thirty. While there has been a gradual increase in the number of registrants, the average number graduated each year has been relatively constant, about twenty. An overwhelming majority reported that they were married, employed in the state of Louisiana, and have permanent teaching certificates.

Active recruitment efforts might well be directed towards male and black students. Also some effort should be directed toward placing graduates in rural school districts. Administrators need to be informed that graduates are available, and graduates need to be aware of employment opportunities in rural areas. The survey did not address itself to determining whether graduates were returning to their home communities to work or whether they were looking for employment in new and more populated areas.

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

Forty-one (79%) of the respondents reported that they were working full-time in school special education programs or in some agency whose primary responsibility is providing services for exceptional children. Some of the remaining 21% reported that they were employed as regular education teachers. Only eight graduates (7%) reported that they were unemployed, and none of these indicated that they had ruled out working with exceptional children at some future time.

Throughout the rest of the section of the report, employment information is reported for the 41 graduates who indicated that they were employed full-time in some agency that provides service for exceptional children. Table 1 shows the employing agencies and the primary duties reported by these respondents. By far, the greatest proportion are employed by public school districts as classroom teachers of exceptional children. Roughly a third (31.7%) of the respondents were doing something other than classroom teaching and working for a variety of agencies other than public schools. While the numbers in the other categories are low, the variety of jobs held by graduates seems to be fairly large. (See Table 1)

Table 1

Employing Agencies and Primary Duties of Respondents

Employing Agencies	Number
Public school district	27
Parochial school district	1
Private community agency	2
College or university	5
State dept. of education	3
Another state dept.	1
Other types of agencies	2
Total	41

Primary Duties	Number
Teachers of exceptional children	29
Principals, supervisors, or directors of exceptional children	2
Resource person or consultant to parents or professional persons	1
Resource person or crisis intervention person	2
Diagnosticians	3
College or university teacher	1
Other types of positions	3
Total	41

The non-public school job sources include institutions of higher learning, community agencies, and parochial special education programs. The non-teaching duties extend from administrative positions to diagnostic services and resource room programs. Some of those who were engaged in diagnosis might well be employed at college and university-based clinics. The organization of diagnostic services in the State of Louisiana would

suggest this possibility.

The important point is that, based on employment sites and responsibilities of graduates, there is a variety of employment opportunities open to special education graduates. This kind of information is useful when students currently enrolled or prospective enrollees press faculty advisors for an answer to queries about job possibilities.

Table 2 shows the reported place of work and age of client served. The frequencies indicate, as do those in Table 1, that the majority of graduates are working in schools with school-aged children. However, a sizable minority of about one-third reported that they worked outside the classroom and with a client group that is not of school age.

As the data are presented here, there is no certainty that there is any kind of match between the non-school, non-teaching, and non-school-age serving individuals. What can be said is that again the frequencies seem to support the hypothesis that graduates have found employment in and outside of school programs for exceptional children.

Recent legislation in Louisiana extended the age limits for educational eligibility for exceptional children. The age limits as of 1972 are 3 to 21. At the time the survey was conducted, the new legislation had not been fully implemented. This might have a bearing on the low frequencies of employment at the pre- and post-school ages. However, the responses indicate that some jobs are available and that persons with special eduation teacher training are filling them.

Table 2

Respondents' Place of Work and Age of Client Served

Place of Work	Number
Classroom (day or residential school)	26
Resource room, media center, diagnostic clinic	4
School district office or building office	7
College or university classroom	2
Other	1
Total	40*

*One respondent did not reply to this item.

Age of Client Served	Number
Pre-school age	3
School age	30
Post-school age	8
Total	41

Services for exceptional children have received special attention in recent years throughout the country. Nearly every state has enacted new legislation and provided an increase in funds for exceptional children. New programs have been established in schools and in other ancillary community agencies. Special education teacher training institutions, while primarily directed toward serving educational needs, have perhaps indirectly served as an important training resource for these new programs and facilities. As a group the majority of graduates who responded to this survey indicated that they are doing the kinds of things that they were directly trained to

do. The other third reported that they were serving exceptional children but not exactly as their training indicated.

Table 3 presents information related to years of experience in classroom teaching in both regular and special education. Personal data, cited earlier, indicated that as a group the graduates are young; therefore, it is not surprising that not many have more than ten years of classroom teaching experience. The frequencies also indicate that the graduates represent a group of educators with a good deal of experience in both areas of education: regular and special. Finally, only one respondent indicated that he did not have state certification in the area in which he was employed.

Table 3

Experience as a Classroom Teacher

Experience	Regular Classroom	Special Education Class
None	3	5
One to three years	14	20
Four to ten years	18	14
More than eleven years	6	2
Total	35	41

In conclusion, graduates have found employment primarily as teachers of exceptional children in public schools. To provide that kind of professional person is a stated goal of the teacher training programs. But, other graduates are working in a wide variety of other types of jobs, both within and outside of schools. The majority are working with school-

aged children. But some are working with age groups below and above the normal school ages. It might be hypothesized that the special education graduates are a group with broad qualifications and experience and with broad employability and adaptability.

FINANCIAL STATUS INFORMATION

The survey also attempted to elicit information about salaries earned by the graduates. Almost half (44%) reported that their total annual family income exceeded $20,000. Thirty-six percent reported their family income to be between $10,000 and $20,000. The remainder (19%) reported total income of less than $10,000. No unmarried person reported a family income in the highest bracket; only three persons in the lowest annual income bracket reported that they were married. A high total annual income for this group of graduates is related to being married rather than to high remuneration from employment in education.

Respondents were also asked to report income from teaching or other positions in education. No one reported receiving an income of more than $20,000, but 38% reported that they were receiving between $10,000 and $20,000. Forty-two percent reported that they were receiving between $7,000 and $10,000; the remainder (3%) reported that their salaries were less than $7,000.

An attempt was made to describe the group that received between $10,000 and $20,000. Six of the twenty are under 30 years of age; seven more are under 40. Twenty have been employed in their present positions for less than three years; five, all female, have more than eleven years of classroom teaching experience. The four males are young (under 40)

and have had relatively little classroom teaching experience.

Seventy-one percent of the total group of 52 respondents reported that they were full-time students while working toward their degrees. Forty-eight percent had financial assistance in the form of United States Office of Education fellowship stipends. Thirty-six percent financed their education with personal savings or parental subsidies. Approximately one-third answered affirmatively to items that asked whether they had borrowed money from relatives, worked part or full time, or depended on their spouse's earnings.

PROFESSIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL STATUS

The majority of respondents reported that they were not taking additional coursework at the time they replied to the survey and had not taken any coursework after finishing the master's degree. A few reported that they were working toward a specialist's certificate or a plus-30 program or that they had completed certification requirements in an additional area of special education. The most frequently cited reason for taking additional courses was simply for personal and/or professional growth.

Interestingly enough, although not many respondents indicated that they were or had been involved in further graduate study for a degree, two-thirds said they would seriously consider starting a doctoral program within the next three years. Actually, one respondent had completed a doctoral program, and two were working toward doctorates.

Only thirteen respondents indicated that they belonged to no professional organizations in the field of exceptional children. Most people held membership in the Council for Exceptional Children. The other most

frequently listed organizations were the Association for Retarded Citizens, the Mental Health Association, and the Association for Children With Learning Disabilities. Many reported that they were active in the organizations in that they had attended at least three professional meetings on non-work time, attended a state or national meeting, or held an elected office. Two reported that they had published articles in the area of special education.

PROGRAM EVALUATION INFORMATION

Sixteen items were included in order to guage the graduates' evaluation of the master's program. A six point, low to high, rating scale was used for fourteen of those evaluation items. For analysis in this paper only the responses of the graduates who reported themselves to be full-time, salaried workers in the field of exceptional children were used. Frequency counts of one, two, and three ratings were summed to compute a low score. Frequency counts of the other three ratings were summed to obtain a high score. Two thirds of the respondents indicated that the total program contributed effectively to their present job competence. Generally, they gave high marks to the quality of instruction and informational content of special education courses. The responses also indicated that graduates found courses in related fields -- such as psychology, speech pathology, and social work -- highly valuable. Overall, graduates indicated that they found coursework valuable (except for general education courses), and they did not vote to decrease coursework. In fact, they strongly suggested that courses such as remedial reading and counseling techniques be added to the curriculum. Moreover, they indicated that the practicum or field experience contributed positively to their competence. Responses indicated that quality of super-

vision from both the university faculty and the site supervisor was adequate.

Finally, since most voted for a change, graduates indicated that there are weaknesses in the program. Furthermore, they seemed to want that change to be in the direction of additional coursework: reading, counseling, and related fields. They did not vote to decrease practicum hours but rather to add course work to the total hours now required.

The last two items were also evaluation items. Graduates were asked to indicate the particular aspect of the training program which contributed most and least to its quality. Clearly, no one part of the program received top rating. The graduates reported that all aspects in combination were most valuable. Contact with the faculty and field experiences other than the practicum reportedly were least valuable.

In conclusion, this survey provided a variety of information about recent master's level graduates of special education programs at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. The data provided descriptive information about personal, employment, professional, and financial status of the graduates, as well as program evaluation which can be used for planning.

Some statements that can be made as a result of the survey are the following. (1) Special education graduates have found employment in systems (including but not limited to public schools) that deliver services to exceptional children. (2) Graduates are working with a wide variety of types of children in a wide variety of employment settings. (3) Generally, graduates reported that they are professionally active in organizations that serve exceptional children. (4) Graduates reported that their preservice training contributed positively to their job competency. (5) They

also recommended that the program be changed by adding coursework in such areas as remedial reading, counseling and other related fields.

In terms of self-evaluation, the results suggested that positive recruitment efforts be extended in order to attract male and black students. Both at the recruitment stage and at the job search stage, some attention should be given to the needs of rural areas. Program changes should be considered which reflect the recommendations of the respondents (i.e., that the importance of the practicum be maintained and that provision be made for coursework in the deficiency areas indicated).

This survey attempted to assess a set of output variables. It is limited in that respondents were the graduates; no information was solicited from supervisors, administrators or other hiring agents. The respondents were what might be termed successfal graduates in that they received the degree goal and found employment. The other two groups, hiring agents and unsuccessful students, might describe themselves and the programs differently than this report indicates. Those constitute other studies and suggestions for further research. The data reported from this study must stand on its own merit. They have resulted in the conclusions stated and have given a basis for future change and study.